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Beyond the Manhattan Project

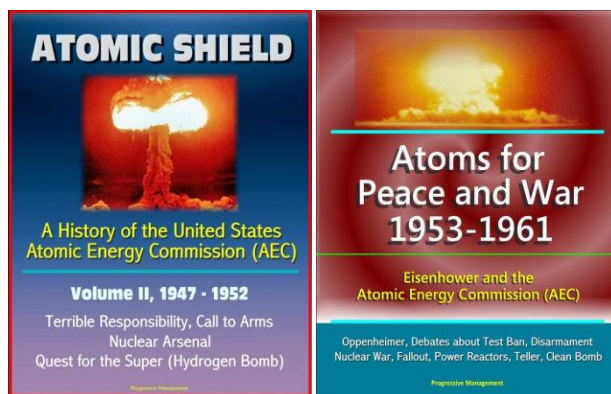
Books and documentaries that showcase Lab history after World War II

By National Security Research Center staff

They are at it again, on this occasion just in time for [National Library Week](#).

Last year, staff members from the [National Security Research Center](#) (NSRC, the Laboratory's classified library) recommended their favorite books and movies about Los Alamos National Laboratory during the Manhattan Project. This time out, NSRC Director **Riz Ali** and Senior Historian **Alan Carr**, joined by Historian **Nicholas Lewis**, tackle a greater challenge, recommending their favorite books, publications and documentaries that cover the Laboratory's history *after* World War II.

Must-read books



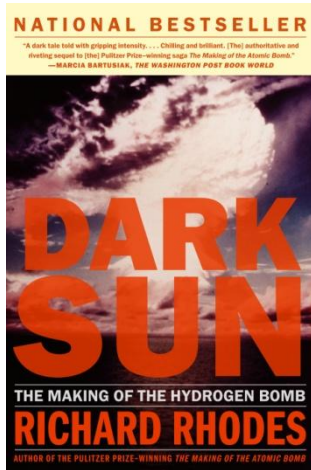
Atomic Shield and Atoms for Peace and War

First published in 1962, *Atomic Shield* serves as Volume 2 of a three-volume history of the United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) that covers the years between 1947 and 1952.

Volume 3 of the history of the AEC, *Atoms for Peace and War* chronicles the years 1952 to 1961, namely the "Eisenhower Years."

Alan Carr: "When I first hired-on at the Laboratory, my predecessor, (retired Archivist/Historian) Roger Meade, introduced me to these books. And by 'introduced,' I mean he made me read them. As you might expect, these books aren't exactly thrillers—they're slow, dense and detailed. Although they might not be dynamic as narratives, the scholarship in both books is outstanding. Both volumes are authoritative."

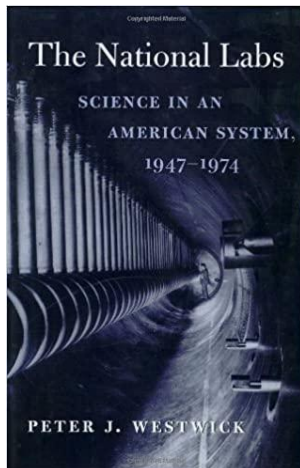
Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb



Written by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Richard Rhodes, this book tells the often-shocking story of the politics and science behind the development of the hydrogen bomb and the beginning of the Cold War.

Nicholas Lewis: “I would say that rich, character-oriented storytelling is Richard Rhodes’ hallmark. *Dark Sun* brings that kind of engaging narrative to the development of hydrogen weapons in the United States and in the Soviet Union, including the complex clashes among scientists, politicians and military leaders on both sides of the Cold War. Rhodes is particularly adept at making the tensions driving these projects palpable for readers, culminating in the mid-1950s when the two superpowers were poised against one another with thermonuclear weapons.”

The National Labs: Science in an American System, 1947–1974



This book covers the history of America's national laboratories—namely Los Alamos, Brookhaven, Argonne, Lawrence Berkeley, Oak Ridge and Lawrence Livermore—from 1947 to 1974.

Nicholas Lewis: “This is quite simply the best overview in existence of the formation and evolution of the U.S. national lab system. I most enjoyed that Peter Westwick could take a subject as complicated as the development of the AEC’s lab system over its first three decades and make it so astonishingly clear to the reader. This book provides readers with a lot of ‘ah ha!’ moments, as Westwick dissects how and why so many of the deep-seated structures, practices and functions of the labs first formed and how they became so enduring over the Cold War.”

Essential publications

[The Atom](#)



Published between 1964 and 1984, this Lab-produced monthly magazine covered the latest stories on prominent projects, employee profiles and articles about local events.

Alan Carr: “All the magazines have been scanned and are now available online at the Lab’s Research Library. Thumbing through these magazines, you really get a feel for what the Lab was like during the Cold War.”

[“Of Clouds and Craters: The History of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing”](#)

Laboratory Historian Alan Carr does the seemingly impossible by chronicling the history of U.S. nuclear weapons testing in a short article.

Alan Carr: “With the help of many testing veterans, fellow historians, librarians and archivists, I put together a story I think works pretty well. The article combines well-known information with firsthand accounts available nowhere else. I think readers will quickly get a feel for the testing era by reading the article, but you be the judge!”

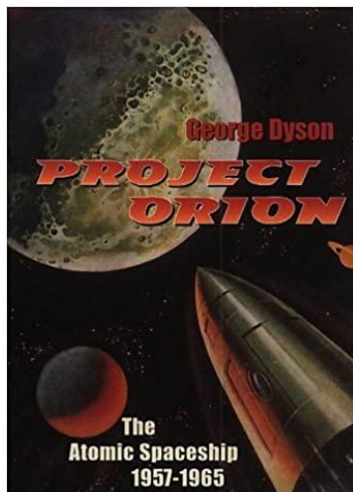
Captivating documentaries

[Always/Never: The Quest for Safety, Control, and Survivability](#)

Produced by Sandia National Laboratories, this documentary combines rare historical footage with a variety of interviews that delve into how the national laboratories contributed to the safety and security of nuclear weapons from the dawn of the atomic age to the end of the Cold War.

Riz Ali: “This documentary presents first-hand accounts from scientists, engineers and key decision makers on how and why nuclear weapons were refined during the Cold War. This is a must-watch documentary for anyone interested in how brilliant scientists and engineers developed ingenious solutions to help meet national security objectives and military requirements.”

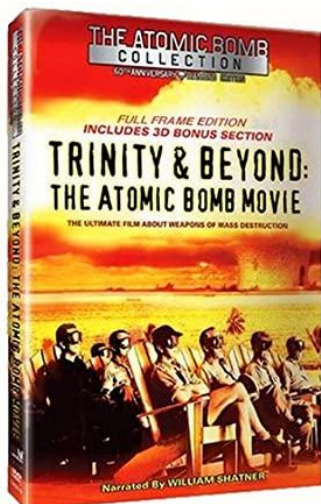
The Secret History of Project Orion: To Mars by A-Bomb



This documentary (based on the book by George Dyson) chronicles Project Orion, which proposed to use atomic power to propel rockets into outer space. This is what science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke had to say about this surreal project: “The idea isn’t crazy, except the idea we might do it might be crazy.”

Riz Ali: “There are countless discoveries made as a result of the research into the development of atomic weapons. One of the more unusual ‘thought experiments’ conducted was to consider if it was feasible to use small nuclear detonations to propel a space ship. This [documentary by the BBC](#) gives a fascinating glimpse into this research.”

Trinity and Beyond: The Atomic Bomb Movie



Made in 1995, this documentary uses restored archive footage to chronicle all things atomic, starting with the Trinity test of 1945 through the first atomic bomb test by the Chinese in 1964.

Alan Carr: “This documentary brings together two things all people love: explosions and William Shatner, the film’s narrator. Here’s something interesting: Five years ago, Los Alamos didn’t have the capability to safely project—much less adequately scan—old film. Thanks in large part to Pete Kuran (this documentary’s filmmaker) and our colleagues at Lawrence Livermore, the NSRC now has a state-of-the-art filming laboratory that’s operated by highly skilled technicians.”

Have a favorite book, publication or documentary in mind?

If you do, feel free to share it with the NSRC! You can also contact our staff for assistance with your research needs at nsrc@lanl.gov.